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'I want to participate.' transition experiences of new refugees in Glasgow

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ABSTRACT

The particular case of transition from the uncertain position of an asylum seeker to a refugee with statutory rights is used to explore the interaction of structure and agency in refugees' lived experience of integration in super-diversity. Analysis draws on data generated through the 'Holistic Integration Service', available to all new refugees in Scotland from 2013 to 2016. Case data from 1885 households, interviews ($n = 24$) and focus groups with refugees and service providers ($n = 13$) showed that refugees' desire to be independent was thwarted by inaccessible systems that were insensitive to language and cultural barriers, and the cumulative demands of transition. The transition experiences of living in hostels and B&B accommodation; racism; poverty and disruption of social networks undermined effective integration. Evidence suggests that the experiences of transition disrupt settlement and disempower refugees creating a dependency on cultural mediation and advocacy for access to statutory rights and services.

KEYWORDS

Refugee; integration; super-diversity; housing; welfare benefits; Scotland

Recent policy debate has demonstrated concerns about the impacts of increasing social diversity resulting from growing global migration. Anxieties about competition for resources, social tensions and fears of rising ideological extremism have escalated across Europe. Much attention has been paid to 'immigration' policy, and the control of migration flows. In October 2015, Teresa May, then U.K. Home Secretary, suggested: 'When immigration is too high, when the pace of change is too fast, it's impossible to build a cohesive society' (Nelson 2015). On the other hand, the challenge of supporting 'integration' remains contested and relatively neglected. It is unlikely that the increase of diversity can be halted in a globalised and connected world, and so there is a pressing need for greater understanding of the relationships between diversity and integration in modern societies.

Scholars draw a distinction between the use of the terms 'assimilation', to refer to a one-way absorption of the newcomer into an established society, and 'integration' as an essentially two-way process of adaptation by both receiving society and migrants (Berry 1997; ECRE 1999). Others warn of the normative assumptions implying that all migrants should

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be seeking to 'integrate' (Losi and Strang 2008; Strang and Ager 2010; Charsley 2012). The term 'resettlement' is used to encompass a temporary dimension including settlement and return (Erdal and Ezzati 2014). In his seminal paper on 'super-divers' Vertovec challenges the over use of ethnicity for analysing diversity in the U.K. (2007). He argues for recognition of increasing complexity within diversity suggesting that this is characterised by dimensions including: 'differential immigration statuses and their concomitant entitlements and restrictions of rights, divergent labour market experiences, discrete gender and age profiles, patterns of spatial distribution, and mixed local area responses by service providers and residents' (Vertovec 2007, 1025). This framing fundamentally challenges the notion of resettlement as assimilation – a one-way process of adaptation by the newcomer into an existing homogenous group. Moreover, it allows that adaptation and resettlement may be partial, unintended and flow in different directions over time.

Since 2000, following the introduction of the U.K. government 'Dispersal policy' refugees and asylum seekers have substantially contributed to the diversity of many cities across the U.K. (Immigration and Asylum Act, 1999). For example, the ethnic diversity of the city of Glasgow increased from 7.2% in 2001 to 15.5% in 2011 (Population and Migration Office of National Statistics). In the past two decades, the arrival of refugees has broadened the mix of ethnicities within the population (top three countries of origin in 2015: Somalia, Afghanistan, Syria, UNHCR). The refugee population itself exemplifies multiple dimensions of 'super-diversity'. Refugee integration provides a valuable context for the study of dimensions of diversity and also the 'interplay of these factors' (Vertovec 2007, 1025)

Over the past two decades, scholars have studied refugee resettlement to identify critical factors contributing to integration. Ager and Strang provide a holistic definition of integration that identifies 10 distinct domains (2004; 2008). Along with Vertovec, they argue that dimensions of diversity are interrelated and that experiences in one domain will influence progress in another. They suggest that integration requires a basis of equal rights to access resources, and emphasise the centrality of social connections in enabling progress in integration through all the domains (Ager and Strang 2008). Phillimore (2012) similarly emphasises both social connections and access to rights and argues that effective integration depends not only on the existence of social networks, but also the capacity and means to employ those networks for the sharing of resources. This resonates with the work of Forrest and Kearns on neighbourhood social cohesion (2001) which suggests core domains: social order and social control; social networks and social capital; and place, attachment and identity.

Whilst this literature attempts to engage with the complexity of refugee integration, it might also be critiqued as de-politicising the issue by focusing on individual experience over structural context. Indeed, Grzymala-Kazłowska and Phillimore (2017) point out in their introduction to this special issue, the notion of super-diversity has itself been criticised for downplaying the structures and processes of inequality and exclusion in favour of local and cultural differences. Yet, as we have suggested, it is social and political ideals, fears and ambitions that drive the design and implementation of integration policy. A number of key political imperatives are currently apparent in refugee integration policy in Europe, and each has subtly different implications for the approach to integration. Firstly: the upholding of a humanitarian commitment to provide safety to people who are 'unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded

fear of persecution' (Geneva Convention, in UNHCR, 2010¹). On this basis, the obligation of the receiving society towards refugees is to provide temporary sanctuary with little expectation of investment in integration. Secondly: the protection of access to resources in order to maintain quality of life within each country. As Oosterlynck et al. (2015) have pointed out, the identification of legitimate claim on resources appeals to sources of 'solidarity'. 'Social Contract' theory suggests that solidarity derives from the principle that only those who contribute to society have a right to benefit from society (Morris 1999). In line with this, Koopmans (2010) suggests there is a trade-off between high demands for migrant adjustment and indicators of integration. Thirdly: a social cohesion agenda that reflects wider concerns about social divisions and tensions in the face of growing 'super-diversity' within neighbourhoods and nations. Grzymala-Kazłowska and Phillimore (2017) argue that social cohesion is 'more questionable than ever' in the current context of super-diversity.

It follows that our analysis of integration must encompass not only the diversity of people, but also the diversity of the structures and processes that provide the conditions for integration. We argue that in a context of super-diversity, we need to examine the interplay between the agency of diverse people and the processes and structures which make up what Meissner (2017) refers to in this issue as the 'conditionalities of entry and the parameters of presence'. Along with Meissner we suggest that differences in legal status play an important role in shaping (though not determining) migration related diversity. We seek to avoid becoming diverted by attempting an ever more nuanced identification of difference. Instead we use the lens of transition in legal status to examine the everyday experience of integration for refugees.

Access to rights: a case study of refugee integration in practice

The majority² of refugees in the U.K. receive their refugee status as a result of claiming asylum in country rather than through resettlement programmes. As 'asylum seekers' – whose claims are not yet determined – the applicants do not have access to public funds (Immigration and Asylum Act, 1999). However, most asylum seekers receive minimal (housing and financial) support from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) on the basis that they would otherwise be destitute. Accommodation is allocated anywhere in the U.K. on a 'no-choice' basis. It is very rare for asylum seekers to be granted permission to work in the U.K.³ In Scotland asylum seekers have full access to healthcare. The term 'refugee' is generally used to refer those who have been recognised by the state as refugees, and to make a distinction with someone whose claim for asylum has yet to be finally decided. An individual who has been recognised as in need of international protection can be granted either 'Discretionary leave to remain'; 'Humanitarian Protection' or 'Refugee Status'. A refugee is expected to undertake paid work, but has the right – if in genuine need – to access mainstream welfare benefits, homelessness assistance and social housing, on the same basis as citizens. Unlike asylum seekers, refugees in the U.K. can access further and higher education. Housing, healthcare and education are devolved responsibilities to the Scottish Government, and therefore exact provision will vary between Scotland and the rest of the U.K.

The transition from 'asylum seeker' to 'refugee' is a pivotal moment in the relationship between the refugee and the receiving society. It is the point at which the state

acknowledges a humanitarian and legal responsibility towards the individual. There are explicit changes in rights and responsibilities, however very little is known about the way these are implemented and the impact that this has on the wider personal and social environment. Peoples' experiences of transition from a 'tolerated' asylum seeker to an 'accepted' refugee provide a context in which to examine integration in practice both from the perspective of the structures of the receiving society and the agency of the refugee.

In 2013 the Scottish Refugee Council and partners⁴ launched the Holistic Integration Service funded by BigLottery Scotland. The partnership set out not only to support new refugees as they engage with their transition to a different legal status, but also to generate comprehensive data recording their integration experiences. This study draws on this unique data set to examine how U.K. integration policy works in practice. We examine the experiences of new refugees who have arrived through the asylum route in accessing their rights to welfare benefits and housing. From the case study of the Glasgow context we examine everyday interactions between structure and agency in order to gain new insights into adaptation and resettlement in an era of super-diversity.

Refugee integration in the Scottish context

The city of Glasgow has become one of the largest U.K. dispersal sites for asylum seekers outside London. Through the 1990s the population of Scotland was falling but grew again since mid-2001 from just over 5 million in 2001 to over 5.4 million in 2015. It is estimated that in March 2015 there were around 3300 asylum seekers in Glasgow (Scottish Government 2015). Scottish Government has supported refugee integration as a lead partner in the 'New Scots: Integrating Refugees in Scotland's Communities' 2014–2017 strategy.

The vision behind this strategy is for a Scotland where refugees are able to build a new life from the day they arrive in Scotland and to realise their full potential with the support of mainstream services; and where they become active members of our communities with strong social relationships. ('New Scots' Strategy, Scottish Government 2014)

Between May 2013 and April 2016, all new refugees⁵ in Scotland were eligible for up to twelve months support from the Holistic Integration Service. This has included English language assessment, advice and advocacy from Integration Advisers, language and employability programmes and intensive personal support for those with complex needs. (Scottish Refugee Council 2014, 2015, 2016)

Data collection

The data presented in this paper were collected between May 2013 and December 2015 as part of the learning and evaluation programme of the Holistic Integration Service. Systematic case data from 1885 refugee households were recorded by Integration Advisers. The accuracy of this data depended on the skill and diligence of these front-line staff members who recognised the critical value of generating accurate data on refugees' experiences.

Focus group discussions with front-line staff (6 groups), project managers (3 groups) and beneficiaries (4 groups) were conducted throughout the programme. During the

final year, 24 semi-structured interviews were conducted with people who had used the service. Interviewees were selected from case data according to criteria generated by the issues emerging from the programme (SRC 2015).

- 6 people who had gained paid employment
- 3 people who experienced delays of over 28 days in initial welfare benefits payments
- 3 people who had been sanctioned by the Jobcentre Plus
- 3 people living in settled accommodation, having spent over six months in temporary homeless accommodation
- 3 people currently living in homeless accommodation
- 3 people who attended English Language Requirement classes provided by Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
- 3 people who attended English courses provided by Holistic Integration Service partners (total 4 interviewees as 2 sisters joined 1 interview)

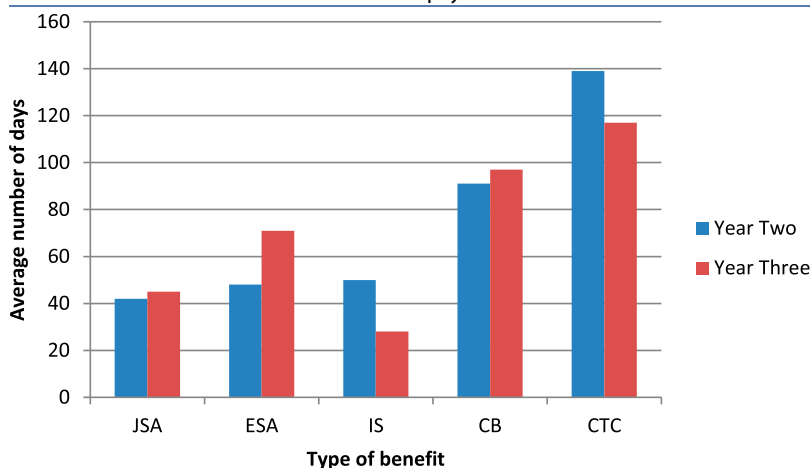
Interviewees were selected randomly from those eligible using information from case data. Interviews to elicit information about beneficiaries' experiences of integration were conducted by the research team and two trained volunteers. These followed a semi-structured schedule guided by the 'Indicators of Integration' framework, (Ager and Strang 2008).

The research cohort

Of the new refugees who engaged with the service between May 2013 and December 2015,⁶ 76% ($n = 1395$) were male and 24% ($n = 490$) female. Seventy-eight per cent ($n = 1470$) came alone and 22% ($n = 415$) with other members of their immediate family. Three hundred and fourteen households (17%) had at least one family member aged under 18 years. A majority of all service beneficiaries (73% $n = 1369$) were aged between 25 and 39 years. Forty-two per cent ($n = 262$) of those who provided details of their previous educational background had completed formal education to only primary school level or below, 26% ($n = 163$) to secondary level, and 31% ($n = 193$) had undertaken either further or higher educational study. Within this sample, there was little significant variation of educational level by gender. People from 50 different countries accessed the service, with the four main countries of origin being Eritrea (30%), Sudan (21%), Iran (15%) and Syria (10%).

Findings

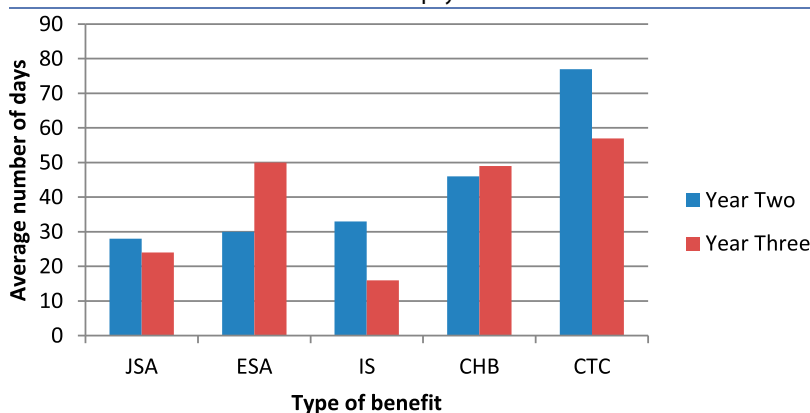
When notified that they have been granted some form of leave to remain, new refugees are also notified that after 28 days (from the decision date) their asylum support will be stopped. Although now eligible to work, most new refugees do not find paid work immediately after receiving status (Scottish Refugee Council 2016). Therefore, most new refugees need to rely on mainstream welfare benefits and housing support straight after the cessation of support through the NASS. In this paper, we will examine the data on new refugees' access to mainstream welfare benefits and to housing support.

Table 1. Time from status to first welfare payment.

Welfare benefits: delays in receiving benefits

The average length of time elapsing between allocation of status and first payment across all types of benefit exceeded 28 days in year two and three of the service.

Table 1 shows that the average wait for Jobseekers Allowance (the benefit received by the majority of refugees) was more than 40 days after receiving status. Therefore, the average person has been without recourse to any financial support for 12 days after asylum support was withdrawn. Waiting times for other benefits, such as Employment Support Allowance, Child Benefits and Child Tax Credits were considerably longer (Scottish Refugee Council 2016). Families experienced extreme hardship. For example, one single mother with three children waited three months to receive any benefit payments (because she had not been allocated a National Insurance Number⁷) and a further three months for Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit. Initially she relied on crisis grants and charitable support (food and clothes banks) and after three months only received £73.00 each week to pay for everything.

Table 2. Time from claim to first welfare payment.

Case data shows that there are also delays occurring between the time when a new refugee first registers their claim for benefits, and the first payment of benefit is made (Table 2).

Under these conditions it would be necessary to submit a claim immediately on receiving news of status in order to achieve a smooth transition from asylum support to Job Seekers Allowance. For other benefits, even this would not be sufficient.

Welfare benefits: understanding the system

There are a number of factors that contributed to delays in the receipt of welfare benefit. Firstly, individuals introduced delay by not applying promptly. Although all new refugees should receive a leaflet from the DWP explaining the benefit system, case data indicates that refugees were often unaware of the urgency in applying for benefits and found the system very confusing:

Once I got status ... it was very confusing, the language and financial [situation] ... [was] very stressful. I did not know what to do, where to go. B1

Participants commonly reported that they struggled to get sufficient help through statutory services,

Did you talk to Jobcentre Plus about the problem?

Yes they say they will send me but they don't do anything. B1

The DWP directed applicants to the online application process for Job Seekers Allowance. However, this process cannot be completed where an applicant does not have a National Insurance Number (NINo). Refugees often had little understanding of the need for, or process of acquiring a NINo. Those with little English language were not happy to use telephone helplines.

Welfare benefits: dependence on non-statutory advisory services

Between April 2014 and March 2015, 95.5% of new refugees joining the service needed help to make their first benefit claim ($n = 844$). The profile of the whole cohort included highly educated people with strong English language skills, suggesting that even the most resilient need additional support in order to access their rights.

The majority claimed Job Seekers Allowance (88%) and of these 39.5% needed extensive advocacy from their Integration Adviser before a NINo was allocated. Advisers reported that in supporting refugees' claims, they made use of an internal DWP contact person whose role was to troubleshoot problems, but who was not directly available to benefit claimants (Table 3).

Welfare benefits: experience of sanctions

In the U.K. a claimant for Job Seekers Allowance is required to agree and adhere to a contract known as the 'Claimant Commitment'. The system requires that the terms of the commitment are drawn up in discussion with the claimant and consist of activities that

Table 3. Procedural problems with issuing NINo.

How it should work in theory	How it works in practice
Receive status	Receive status
Home Office notifies DWP that NINo can be allocated and transfers personal information.	39.5% of new refugees required intensive advocacy from HIS to obtain a NINO
DWP allocates a NINo and sends to the Home Office.	No NINo allocated (for at least 39.5% of HIS beneficiaries)
Home Office notifies new refugees of their NINo at the same time as grant of status.	No NINo allocated (for at least 39.5% of HIS beneficiaries)
New refugees receive benefit as soon as 28 day 'Move-on' period finishes.	Refugees receive no financial support after Home Office support stops
	New refugees eligible for JSA wait between 24 and 28 days after first claim (42 days after being notified of status)
	New refugees not eligible for JSA wait even longer

can be reasonably expected of the claimant in pursuing employment. If claimants fail to complete the activities they can be sanctioned by the stopping of benefit payment for between 4 weeks and 156 weeks (3 years).

Interview data indicated that refugees were sanctioned as a result of failing to manage the cumulative effect of multiple demands, especially during the early months after being granted status.

... someone from Jobcentre said to me; 'You first have to come to collect your bus pass travelling to go to Ingeus [compulsory language classes provided by DWP] ... and again the Home Office called me, 'You have to clear out your luggage out from this house, because your time is finished here. B10 (sleeping at the mosque with all his possessions at time of sanctions)

I couldn't go to the website and check the job so they sanctioned me because of that ... B24

It would appear that sanctions were being rigidly applied even where, for example, a refugee had informed staff in advance that he would have to miss classes:

I even told them prior to going that I'm going to leave two lessons, I don't know if they didn't pay attention ... B15

On this occasion the refugee was told that his reason for not attending was not acceptable. However, when his Integration Adviser presented the same reason for non-attendance the sanction was rescinded. Case notes demonstrate that Integration Advisers have supported several clients to challenge sanctions and get benefits reinstated.

Tutors observed that beneficiaries were not clear about the requirements of the 'Claimant Commitment'. Additionally they argued that,

It's not just actually being sanctioned itself, but even the fear of being sanctioned that causes huge anxieties amongst HIS beneficiaries. (Focus group discussion)

Integration advisers suggest that there is likely to be significant underreporting of sanctions as they often found that beneficiaries who did report sanctions were very ashamed and only did so after benefits had been stopped for a long period and their financial problems had become acute.

Refugee agency: living on a low income

Refugees, who share many of the experiences of others living long term on low incomes, explained how carefully they had to manage their money:

There is a separate gas bill that comes for me and I had to top up the electric and also the £29 for council tax and that leaves me with not much left and some days I have to eat only one meal. B22

Additionally, refugees were often under pressure to send remittances to relatives at home, who sometimes did not understand the realities of life on benefits or in low-paid employment:

You know people back home they don't understand the way we live here, they think we are in a mine where money you are picking it from the streets ... they don't understand that ... it is very hard ... B24 (Supporting children and elderly parents)

Language tutors reported that students stopped attending classes, and failed to enrol on new courses because they could not afford the cost of travel. Women with children could not take up offers of classes that either clash with childcare commitments or did not provide free childcare.

Many refugees expressed a sense of shame at being dependent on benefits, and a desire to gain independence through employment or education:

It's not comfortable to go there [Jobcentre Plus] to sign, it's like unemployment especially at my age and I'm in good health ... until now it was the most difficult thing for me, until now it's difficult because I am shy to go to Jobcentre ... B7

I feel guilty just receiving some money from Jobseekers Allowance, because I am healthy, I have a brain to think and I can do things, instead of being helped I like to help ... B17

I am still with Jobseeker Allowance and in fact I want to [be] independent from him ... I want to be free. I think the working is better ... B20

Many of our interviews revealed a tension between refugees' own longer term work ambitions, and the requirements of the benefits system which they felt was putting them under pressure to accept low-skilled work rather than qualify for higher skilled work (Scottish Refugee Council 2015, 2016).

Access to housing: using the 'Homelessness' route

Under Scottish Housing law, local authorities have a legal duty to prevent homelessness if possible and if not, to provide emergency temporary accommodation. However, during the period covered by this study, the policy of Glasgow City Council was to allocate housing only on the day that a person becomes homeless – with nowhere to sleep that night. Across the lifespan of the service, 86% of beneficiaries presented as 'homeless' to Glasgow City Council when their asylum support ended. Interview data indicated that many new refugees were unsure of their rights to housing provision and needed advice:

... because when I received the eviction letter from my Home Office accommodation I brought this letter to here and immediately they [Integration Adviser] phoned the Council and immediately they told them: this lady has been granted and she will be evicted on this date and immediately I have been there [Homeless Services] ... and they provided me with temporary accommodation B16

Moreover, case data indicates that at least 12% of the refugees who sought help from the Council Homelessness services between May and December 2015⁸ were not provided

with temporary accommodation on at least one occasion. Four interviewees, three single men and one single woman, confirmed that they were informed that there was no temporary accommodation available, and were advised to stay with friends.

They say just stay with your friends ... so if you don't have any friends you are going to suffer ...
B21

Interviewees were quick to point out that refugees typically have limited social and family connections in Scotland and so are likely to struggle to depend on their own personal resources to find somewhere to stay. New refugees' friends tend to be either asylum seekers in asylum accommodation other new refugees in temporary accommodation. Neither of these groups are allowed to have extra people to stay in their accommodation.

... all my friends at that time they were staying in hostels and some hostels you're not allowed even to come and sleep with your friends. B10

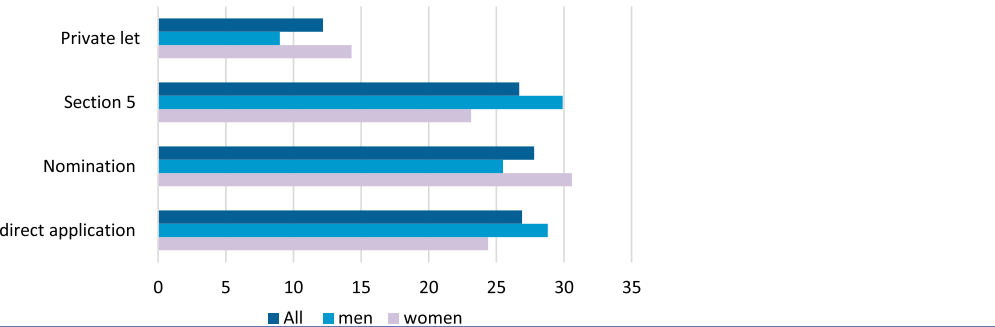
Access to housing: securing settled housing

Service beneficiaries spent, on average, 207 days in homeless accommodation (Table 4). Between April 2014 and March 2015 female headed households were able to secure settled housing more quickly than male headed households. Integration Advisers suggested that this may be because most men were single and most women had children and the competition is less intense for family sized properties. Some advisers acknowledged that they tended to give women, especially those with children, more intensive support as it was easy to assume that single young men would need less help. However, they observed that it was often young men who were slow to realise that they would need to bid for settled housing to move on from temporary accommodation.

Refugees were not clear about their rights, and we found examples of their being given inaccurate information, and being blamed for not understanding the system:

... she [homelessness caseworker] started to shout to me in the office 'You have to think about your children because if you keep refusing otherwise you will stay in the street homeless!' You know at the beginning I didn't know the rules and regulations, that I had to accept or if I refused the first one I should accept the second one or there should be a specific, a strong reason for refusal. B16

Table 4. Number of weeks to secure settled housing.



Access to housing: experiences of temporary accommodation

New refugees typically spent between five and seven months in temporary accommodation including temporary furnished flats, hostels and hotels or 'Bed and Breakfast' (B&B) accommodation. On the whole single people were more likely to be accommodated in hostels and B&Bs, whilst women with children⁹ were usually accommodated in temporary furnished flats. Refugees' accounts of living in temporary accommodation, particularly hostels or B&Bs, present a consistent picture of living conditions that impact negatively on their integration.

Accommodation without residents' cooking facilities was problematic for those adhering to particular religious practices:

... especially we had a month Ramadan we are fasting and there I couldn't cook something. B7

I am Christian and at that time I was fasting as well because of my religion and I then couldn't get like easy cook for my religion food. B21

Refugees experienced a lack of freedom in hostel life, due to the enforcement of curfews and inability to invite friends to visit.

it's like no visitors, you know to be alone sometimes, maybe someone want to visit me just to talk ... but there is no visitors and if I want to stay outside I can't as well ... B7

It was observed that hostel life undermined the fledging friendships that new refugees had begun to develop during their time waiting for an asylum decision.

Eleven of the 25 people interviewed experienced or witnessed aggressive racist behaviour. This appeared to be particularly acute for refugees who were living in temporary homeless accommodation:

The people who live in our building [temporary furnished flat] there are drug addicts and alcoholics and smokers and they insult us, they really insult us, their children throw stones at us ... they insult us, sometimes they throw eggs at us ... B14

Conversely, those who were living in settled housing at the time of their interviews ($n = 13$) tended to comment very positively about living in a 'good', 'safe' or 'quiet' area, with a particular emphasis on having 'nice' neighbours.

Some refugees argued that the rigid regime in their hostel (requirements to sign in at certain times) prevented them from accepting employment with unsocial hours. Others pointed out that if they engaged in part-time and other low-paid employment or full-time education they would lose their housing benefit, but would not be able to afford the rent being charged:

The problem is that if you live there you can't work ... because if you work you can give all the money to the hostel to pay for the hostel, £200/week, that's difficult. B9

I can't work because my home is so expensive for me, I can't work here ... B18

This suggests that although local authorities have a statutory duty to provide housing at a reasonable cost,¹⁰ many refugees could not afford their rent without housing benefit. This creates a barrier to engaging with education or employment.

Refugee agency: dependence on mediation services

The vast majority of the new refugees engaging with the programme over the three-year period needed external intervention in order to access welfare benefits and housing. Even refugees classified as ‘resilient’¹¹ did not succeed in accessing these rights without some intervention. This does not appear to be the result of lack of motivation.

I like to be active myself, I don’t want to depend on others ... because that’s not me. I want to participate. B8

Lack of fluent English speaking, listening, reading and writing skills all combine to make it extremely difficult for even the most resilient individual to apply for welfare benefits directly. Telephone helplines do not enable the non-English speaker to ask questions as there are no automatic facilities for interpretation. Other front-line service providers, such as DWP, are not consistently equipped to deal with speakers of other languages. Moreover, all new refugees are likely to be unfamiliar with Scottish culture and systems. Refugees in this cohort found both the housing and welfare systems very confusing and were unsure of their rights. Interventions by Integration Advisers as cultural mediators were crucial:

If I didn’t get this support from this office (SRC) ... otherwise I will be lost outside because too many people they will start to give me different information which I don’t know which is the right one of them, I will be lost altogether. B16

They (HIS practitioners) lead me to know what my rights is ... everything! B21

Discussion

In principle the transition from status as an asylum seeker to refugee represents the acceptance of a legitimate claim to sanctuary. It is therefore not unreasonable for a refugee to expect that a positive decision to their asylum claim will mark the start of a period of security and stability that will enable them to build a new life. However, as we have reported elsewhere, whilst refugees experience relief and excitement at the news of the positive decision, this is commonly followed very quickly by anxiety, depression and disillusionment (Scottish Refugee Council 2015). This examination of the experience of transition points to some key factors that characterise refugee adaptation and resettlement.

Disruption

We have seen that for most people, this transition resulted in major disruption to settlement. Living arrangements were disrupted as successful asylum seekers were served with eviction notices. New refugees generally moved home at least twice: from asylum accommodation into temporary accommodation and then, months later, to permanent accommodation. Frequent moving undermines friendships, access to schools, colleges and other services. Mulvey found that refugees related more to their neighbourhood than the country, and experienced moving neighbourhood as very disruptive to their emerging sense of belonging (2013).

The nature of the temporary housing and the length of time that refugees spent there also caused disruption to the process of settling. New refugees were not able to maintain

existing friendships under the strict conditions of hostel living. For some the level of control and lack of autonomy interfered with personal religious practice. In addition, higher exposure to racism and other hostility was associated with temporary accommodation. A reduction in social interaction is likely to have a negative effect on language development, access to other resources, confidence and mental health.

Most refugees in this study experienced a period of destitution between the end of asylum support and receipt of mainstream benefits. Destitution creates an acute personal crisis engendering fear, causing hardship, disrupting other important activities and putting pressure on friendships. In addition, refugees described how carefully they had to manage their lives under conditions of ongoing poverty.

This adds to the multiple of demands on the time and attention of a new refugee which in turn can inhibit, or reverse progress in integration. For example some interviewees related that they couldn't attend all the official appointments that were required. Competing demands interfered with learning through disrupting attendance at classes as well as at an emotional and cognitive level inhibiting focus and concentration (Horner and Hamner 2002; Castaneda et al. 2008). Given the crucial role of English language skills as a gateway to so many other things, slow progress in language will slow up progress across all integration pathways (Scottish Refugee Council 2015, 2016).

The evidence demonstrates how the interplay of different aspects of super-diversity can impact on integration. In the context of transition in legal status it appears that the cumulative effect of these factors is often to inhibit or reverse integration.

Disempowerment

Refugees expressed a strong desire to manage their lives independently. However, transition experiences were disempowering for refugees in multiple ways. A lack of understanding (or even a perceived lack of understanding) undermines new refugees' confidence in engaging with new systems and is likely to lead to both delays and mistakes in application for welfare benefits and housing. Benefit sanctions tend to occur in the first six months supporting the conclusion that refugees are being penalised for poor language skills and a lack of cultural understanding. Poor English capacity, lack of support and reliance on online application forms all inhibit becoming familiar with a new process. A lack of confidence to question or challenge is likely to be a key factor excluding new refugees from effective access to their rights. Refugees were also directly denied the authority to act on their own behalf. For example when one refugee's reasons for missing English classes were only accepted when explained by the language tutor, or the need for recourse to a DWP internal adviser not available to individual benefit claimants. As a result, even the most resilient individuals were disempowered.

Some talked explicitly about the shame they felt in depending on welfare benefits instead of working even though they were fit and healthy. Refugees pointed out that living with curfews in temporary accommodation perpetuated this dependency by preventing them from taking up work with unsocial hours. They also argued the high cost of their housing could not be covered with a low-paid or part-time job (in line with Netto 2011).

Temporary accommodation imposed strict controls and curfews undermining autonomy and confidence. The cumulative effect of living for long periods in an environment where people can neither shop nor cook for themselves; and do not have adequate access to basic facilities; feel unable to make and maintain social connections; and judge that they cannot afford to study or take up part-time work is likely to constitute a significant barrier to integration.

The experience of racism was strongly associated with living in temporary accommodation. Refugees reported incidents of abuse and feared leaving home. Avoiding going out reduces opportunities to meet people, practice language skills, learn about the culture and can damage mental health. A neighbourhood study in Glasgow found that migrants (mostly refugees) with poorer English were more likely to feel unsafe going out after dark (Kearns and Whitley 2015). They argue that, housing refugees in deprived areas inhibits social integration and therefore social cohesion because of hostility from other residents.

It is clear that the conditions of transition actually destabilise and disempower, potentially reversing integration and leaving refugees to depend on non-statutory intermediaries to access their statutory rights.

Failure to deliver rights

We have seen that difficulties of transition can result from the failure of structures to ensure access to rights. There has been no provision to prevent homelessness for people emerging from the asylum process. In effect, the 28-day transition period is ignored and the local authority does not take responsibility for the new refugee until this period has ended. Many refugees, especially young men, move from the relative security and freedom of a shared flat (under the asylum system) into a homeless hostel assured only one night at a time. Some nights they are provided with no accommodation. This failure to deliver statutory rights creates severe instability that undermines settlement. As Kirkwood and McNeill (2015) have observed in the case of ex-offenders, using homelessness services should be unnecessary for predictable homelessness and puts pressure on an already overstretched system.

We have also documented a failure to adequately provide for settled housing. New refugees, especially single men, in Glasgow stay in temporary accommodation for several months before moving to settled housing. This reflects a city-wide shortage of accommodation for single people, and contrasts with the previous decade when it was difficult to find accommodation for refugee families in Glasgow (Netto 2011).

Despite the fact that a new refugee has a right to welfare benefits as soon as he or she is granted status, delay in issuing a National Insurance Number (NINo) is the main factor causing delays in payments across the U.K. (Refugee Council 2014; Scottish Refugee Council 2015, 2016). The online benefits application process provides no route for the individual who has not been allocated a NINo to resolve the problem independently. This renders the system inaccessible to legitimate claimants without non-statutory intermediaries.

Finally, it appears that statutory support systems do not accommodate the complex realities of new refugees' lives. Multiple changes are happening simultaneously. Refugees face huge stress as they give their attention to understanding their new situation, recognising

what steps they need to take to access housing and welfare benefits, engaging with English classes and fulfilling their claimant commitment.

Action is required by the state to rectify these systems and processes. If failures to deliver persist, it might be considered that the state has 'an interest in the persistence of contradictions and inefficiencies in policy' (Boswell, 2007 cited in Meissner 2017). As we have argued, the social and political values driving policy can be discerned from its implementation. Under U.K. law new refugees are expected to contribute to society through employment, and only if they are unable to do so are eligible for support on the same terms as settled citizens. We, therefore, conclude that the transitional experiences of refugees in Scotland point to policy driven primarily by the principle of social contract. There is very little evidence of any amendments to the systems to make them accessible in the special circumstances of refugees. Furthermore, action is required on the part of Scottish Government in order to fulfil the strategic vision of enabling refugees, 'to realise their full potential with the support of mainstream services' (Scottish Government 2014).

Refugees' recourse to informal social networks

We have seen that individuals exercise agency by drawing on their own social networks during gaps in service provision. Such opportunities for giving as well as receiving can promote mental well-being (Strang and Quinn 2014; Phillimore 2017). However, they can also put undue pressure on fragile networks. Refugees' initial friendships are usually with other asylum seekers, sometimes neighbours in the same areas of deprivation (Netto 2011; Kearns and Whitley 2015) or with service providers (Strang and Quinn 2014). Kearns and Whitley (2015) found that migrants reported 20% lower levels of social support from neighbours than British born residents. This reflects the concern expressed by Phillimore (2012) that a distinction must be made between 'social networks' (relationships) and 'social capital' (what is exchanged through them).

It is clear that the strain created within local refugee social networks and through obligations to family left behind has potential to undermine not only the financial position of a new refugee, but also their mental well-being. Moreover, as Bourdieu has argued, even a rich network of bonding relationships with other people who are equally excluded from resources does not build social capital, but maintains pockets of poverty and exclusion (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). It would appear that new refugees are not in a strong position to deploy their social networks in order to access resources (as suggested by Phillimore 2012).

Conclusion

In this paper, we use the lens of transition in legal status to examine refugee integration in the context of super-diversity. Emerging evidence of refugees' agency indicates that new refugees generally possess a strong determination to avoid dependence. Yet we have identified structural failures in the delivery of rights which have resulted in disruption and disempowerment in refugees' lives at the very point when society has legitimised their participation. Instead of increasing independence and contribution, it is clear that for most, the immediate impact of receiving refugee status is to interrupt, and even reverse aspects of integration and to increase dependency. Systems and structures that do not

effectively accommodate the realities of super-diversity inhibit participation and contribution to society. There is a danger that such exclusion will create a context which promotes the very conditions which most nations fear: dependence and social division. It is imperative that all societies offering humanitarian protection also ensure that they enable inclusion, that refugee integration policy and practice is based on solidarity as well as humanitarian protection.

Analysis of how statutory rights are actually delivered reveals implicit values underlying policy and practice. At the same time a focus on agency, observing how new refugees are able to navigate the systems and mobilise and develop the resources to build an independent life will provide a more nuanced understanding of adaption and resettlement. In this paper, we have suggested that refugee integration processes demonstrate both the utility and fragility of social networks to provide resource through social capital. Focusing on conditions of disruption and disempowerment created by transition in legal status offers a way to build more nuanced understandings of the processes of integration in the context of super-diversity.

Notes

1. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/protection/basic/3b66c2aa10/convention-protocol-relating-status-refugees.html>
2. In 2015 approximately 8% of new refugees in the U.K. arrived through resettlement schemes. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-statistics-october-to-december-2016/asylum>
3. An asylum seeker can be granted permission to work if they have waited over a year for an initial decision on their claim and can offer a valued skill – this is discretionary and not automatic.
4. Bridges Programmes, British Red Cross, Glasgow Clyde College and WEA Scotland.
5. 'Refugees' in this case refers to those who have been granted refugee status, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave to remain following an asylum claim in the U.K.
6. These figures refer to heads of household rather than all adults in a family, so are likely to under-represent figures of actual people who benefited from the service.
7. This is a unique number which ensures that National Insurance contributions and taxes are recorded. This number is required in order to process welfare benefit claims.
8. Fifty-seven of 494 people.
9. Women headed 65% ($n = 243$) of the 314 single-parent or two-parent households who accessing HIS from 1 April 2013–31 December 2015.
10. Scottish Government Code of Guidance on Homelessness, 2006, Chapter 9, point 9.83.
11. The Holistic Integration Service used four categories from 'Critical' to 'Resilient' to guide clients through appropriate pathways of the services.

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